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TOP SECRET

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 Recognizing that only the most unusual circumstances would cause this country to initiate an armed attack, and to risk even slightly the chance that the chain of events thus precipitated might lead to nuclear war, we should at least make certain that we are prepared to answer in perspective the following questions:

1. How many other Soviet missiles -- ICBM's or submarine-based MRBM's -- are already pointed at the United States?

-- (If the answer is none, does one MRBM complex pose a very real threat when we have so many to deter its use?)

-- Assuming the answer is many, how significantly does one additional complex increase the total number of megatonnage hanging over our heads?

2. If the decision is made that this complex must go, are there non-military means of getting it withdrawn?

-- Pressure on Castro, warning of destruction to island?

-- Pressure on Khrushchev, warning of danger of war or of our stationing nuclear warheads in Berlin or Iran?

3. If the decision is made that it must be taken out by military means, are there any means short of an air strike?

-- Guerrilla action or saboteurs in that area?

4. If the decision is made that it must be taken out by an air strike, can that strike be so swiftly completed and so clearly confined to this one complex that we can announce that our policy remains the same, having merely implemented one feature ("if Cuba should ever become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security") in self-defense, but without any intention of abandoning our traditional peaceful and collective posture?

-- This would presumably sit easier in Hemisphere, among Allies, in UN, perhaps even among the Soviets -- and would prevent Congress from asking how we could engage in general warfare without their declaring war or being consulted.

"Declassified for Publication in
Foreign Relations of the United States"

JFK, Johnson Papers,
Classified by Dept File, 1961-64,
Cuba, General
1962

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5. Other possible questions:

- A. Would it be helpful -- in presenting our case to the nation and world afterwards -- to obtain (presumably publicly through some third nation at the UN, or privately more directly) a new Soviet (and possibly Cuban) denial that such an offensive capability existed?
- B. Can we get the prisoners out first -- so we can explain in our telecast that they were hostages likely to be killed in the event of our strike?
- C. If we announce continued and close surveillance and similar action against any new missiles, do we need a naval blockade (which would stop friendly ships but not Soviet submarines)?
- D. Is another unpopular call-up of reservists essential in the next three weeks?
- E. Can any public announcement be delayed -- in the interests of national security -- until after the missile complex is gone (thus preventing both panic and political turmoil)?
- F. Are we prepared for all contingencies of Soviet counter-action -- e.g., a similar "clean, swift strike" against bases in Turkey or West Berlin?

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